THE CAPTAIN CORNELIUS VERMEULE HOUSE

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In 1693 Adrian Vermeule came to America for a visit and decided to remain, becoming voorleser of Harlem and later Bergen, New Jersey. He married Christina Cadmus in 1708 and in 1735 he bought a plantation of 1200 acres for two sons, Frederich and Cornelius at the Blue Hills in N. J. including parts of what are now Plainfield, North Plainfield and Greenbrook.[1]

In 1736 Frederich and Cornelius built a "great Dutch home" on the land. Frederich never married, but three of Cornelius Vermeule's sons built houses on the land. Adrian built his house in 1770 one-half mile west of the homestead; Lt. Eder's house, new in 1777, was one mile east of the old home; and Capt. Cornelius Vermeule, Jr. built his home in 1784 one-half mile northeast of the homestead.

The family had a saw mill on the Green River (now Green Brook) which ran through the property to provide sawed lumber for their building.[2] During the Revolution there was an encampment and an old fort along the river. The officers of one of General Washington's Regiments stayed at the old house during the winters of 1776 and 1777 and quarters were probably built for them.[8] After the war, a member of the family was entertained at Mount Vernon. The only house still existing is the one built in 1784 by Captain Cornelius Vermeule.

There is no record of earlier settlers on this land. Augustine Herman was granted this area by the Raritan Indians on Dec. 6, 1651. He never settled it. However, the grant was approved by the Dutch government. After the English took control of New Netherland, John Luke Watson on Oct. 28, 1664 was given permission by Governor Nicholls to purchase the land from the Indians in about the same bounds as that granted Herman. This grant was the subject of a dispute for years and was swallowed up in the grant to the 24 Proprietors in 1682.[3] Peter Sonman, a land speculator who held the land from the Proprietors, sold it[4] to Adrian Vermeule.

On Feb. 15, 1781 Cornelius Vermeule (June 30, 1757 - Oct. 11, 1824), a captain of the New Jersey Militia, married Elizabeth Middagh[1], daughter of Col. Dirck Middagh who lived in a Pre-Revolutionary brick house in Raritan[5] and provided a "home of the very best for her"[6]. According to Cornelius C. Vermeule, engineer and historian, this home was built in 1784. Miss Cornelia Vermeule, 96 year old descendent of the original settlers, also said that the home was built by Captain Cornelius for his bride.

Cornelius S. Vermeule sold the land and house to John Stine in April 26, 1824 and it became known as Stine's Farm to neighboring residents. On January 17, 1907 John R. Stine sold the land and house to W.L. Smalley, Jr. Mr. Smalley built a house and other buildings on part of the land and sold a remaining section, including Capt. Vermeule's home, to Timothy F. Harrington on October 12, 1908. Harrington sold the place back to William L. Smalley on May 28, 1925, who in turn sold it to the Green Brook Heights Company on December 7, 1925. It was then sold on September 15, 1928 by that company to Charles H. Firstbrook who sold it to George Townley on November 3, 1937. Mr. Townley sold the home on January 22, 1946 to the present owner, George E. Rittenhouse, Jr.[7] Mr. & Mrs. Hogstrom now own house.

This house is Georgian of a more simple type which was built by the farm families of New Jersey. The facade is symetrical (only slight differences) with five window openings over the central doorway and its four flanking windows. There is a central hallway with a high ceiling extending through the house with a wide, gradual stairway of three runs and two landings. The rooms on the first floor are almost symetrically disposed with two on the right and two on the left (the kitchen has been divided into a kitchen and pantry.) On the second floor there are two rooms on the right and four on the left. The front of the hall has been closed off to become a bathroom. It is a frame structure of heavy oak timbers[6] with mortise-and tenon joints.[1] The walls are lined with brick and covered with clap boards; and the roof is shingled.

Upon examination it was found that the house was not built at one time, but rather grew in a series of stages. In the attic there is proof that the right hand side of the house, including what would be the hall and two right rooms on the lower floors, was at one time higher than the part over the left hand rooms.

The oak rafters over this part are spaced from 34-38 inches apart. They vary in size from 5-1/4 x 2-3/4 to 6x3 and the pins at the mortise and-tenon joints protrude about 6 inches. Some of the larger rafters are notched every 10 inches for strips of wood upon which the shingles were nailed. These rafters are braced with 4 x 4 collars which have a vertical support in their centers, i.e. trusses. The plates and end girts (8 x 5) are rough axed and fit into similar rough corner posts. The left end rafter over this part is scoured and has traces of cement on it and the right end rafter was treated in the same way and still has cement against it. More recent 2 x 4 to 3 x 4 rafters have been placed between these rafters and nailed to them to take the sag out of the roof. These are merely butted together at the top.

On the left side of the attic the rafters are spaced 24-28 inches apart. These are 3 x 4 to 3 x 5 and are mortise-and tenoned together. These were not braced and the pins are cut off flush. There are, however, in this part several very old rafters. They are about 6 x 4 and are rough split logs. The plates and end girt are of sawed oak. Upon taking up part of the floor it was found that the brickwork on this part was solid while in the older upper part the mortor was rotten and the brick was loose. Floor boards (pine) on the old part are 8 to 10 inches wide and run from the end girt to the hall girt in one piece and one piece to the end-hall girt. On the new side they are all about 9 inches wide and they do not run the full length but are pieced together.

Over the original left end girt there is an old stud still connected to what was the end rafter. It is a 2 x 4 nailed to the rafter with old nails and pointed at the bottom end to fit into a notch in the

gift. Other notches are visible. There is no evidence of there ever being a chimney at this old end. The old floor boards run around the two chimneys at the right end and there is no place where they could have been cut out at the left end; and also there is no cement on the rafters. On the present left end the two chimneys now are joined together to form a single central chimney, but at one time they balanced the two right chimneys as evidenced by the newer cement on the end wall where they at one time were and by the cement on the second rafter. These chimneys have a simple cornice at their tops on the exterior.

The end walls are brick lined with cement plastered on the inside. Two windows are on the right (resting on the floor) and one on the left (18 inches off the floor). Each of these sliding sash windows has 12 panes of glass, 8 x 10 inches, with bubbles and other imperfections in them. They are undoubtedly original. The attic is 49 x 31 feet and 12 feet high in the center and is reached by a narrow steep stairway whose pine treads are very worn.

The house was moved sometime between 1910 and 1915, according to A. F. Neumann, by Augustus Mobus. It was moved from its original location 25 feet from Greenbrook Road directly back to its present location 150 feet off the road. The sills were, at this time, covered by brick. On the right section of the building (under the hall and two rooms) the floor is supported by two rough beams running under the hall walls and a rough rummer beam running under the wall dividing the two rooms. Heavy 7 x 5 sawed joists spaced 31 inches apart are notched into the beams to support the floor. This is a carry-over from the Dutch method of using a series of heavy floor joists. The oak floor boards over this are 5 inches wide They are axed to fit over the joists and have simple lap joints. The summer beam is 7 x 10 and the beam uner the right hall wall is 8 x 9. The joists are notched into the 8 x 6 sill under the right hall wall. These joists are cut out just before they meet the sill and at one time they also rested on a sill at this point.

In the other, left, section the sawed joists, many of which have rough edges, are 8½ x 2½ and are spaced 21 inches apart. They notch into a 9 x 9 summer beam. The floor over this had lap joints and the boards are pine 8 to 9 inches wide. The two fireplaces on the right hand side of the house have bases running down through the basement. However, in the left hand side the fireplace in the front room rests on an 9 x 11 axed beam. It appears to have been built this way originally as the mortar runs down over it. The other fireplace on this side, probably the original one, has a base. It is at a right angle to the other fireplaces and is in the wall seperating the two rooms. The base, as it is rebuilt on this foundation, is 33 x 66 inches.

The central hall is 31 feet long, 9-1/2 feet wide and 9-1/2 feet high (height of first floor rooms). The entrance door is newer, being a double door 7-1/2 feet high and 53 inches wide with a large glass panel in each door, of a type popular in this area about 1860-90. The trim around the door is heavy in proportion. The stairway runs up the back of the hall with gradual treads (11 inches wide) and risers (6-1/2 inches). There are 12 steps back to a landing and then 4 more to another landing and 3 more to the top. The handrail appears to be original, but some of the balusters are new (some are iron). The open string staircase has visible step ends with a simple soffit. A support has been added under the stairs. A door opening into a closet under it is original. An oak floor may be seen in the closet of boards 10-12 inches wide.

In 1935 Alexandre Milne put new strip oak floors in the two halls and in the left front room. These old floors at that time were out of level. The right front room has a parquet oak floor which appears to be older and the right rear room has an oak floor added later.

The rear door with its leaded glass has also been more recently added. There are three old door openings, from which the doors have been removed, opening into the two right rooms and the left front room. The frames around them are quite simple and somewhat delicate in scale.

They are harmonious with the old door, chair rail, baseboard, stairway mouldings, and panels over the fireplaces. The cornice is heavier and richer in feeling and was probably added at a later date.

The full doors have six panels on one side and are flush on the other side. Only one of these is found on the first floor, but there are several of them (5) on the second floor.

The newel posts are square in plan and there are extensions of them hanging down from the ceiling with capped ends. The ceilings here in the hall, as throughout the rest of the house (with one exception) are plain flat plaster. The walls are not paneled (the only paneling occurs over the fireplace) and are plaster applied directly to the brick.

The front right room appears to have been the parlor. The doorway opening into it was 7 feet high and 33 inches wide. This room has the largest fireplace being 8 feet long. There is a mantel shelf 8 inches wide under which five alternating plain and metope-triglyph panels flank each side of a larger central panel. This freize design is supported by fluted pilasters with simple base and capitols. There is plain plaster over the mantel shelf.

The openings on each side of the fireplace have arched entraces which is a newer detail. The opening on the left was originally a closet. A chandelier and mirror over the fireplace was added by the Harringtons. The windows in this room and in the other rooms are of a newer vintage. They are 33 x 78 inches. The mouldings are like those around the front door.

This room opens into the back room which is smaller (19½ x 14 vs. 19½ x 16½). The fireplace here is a little smaller. It has a mantel shelf and a plain panel with a slightly projecting central panel. Pilasters flank each side of the fireplace and are extended up to the shelf. This room has the arched openings on each side of the fireplace. The one on the left was originally a closet. This room was probably used as a bedroom; the fireplace is almost identical with the fireplace in the front bedroom on

the second floor.

The left front room, the dining room, was the family-living room and before that a parlor. It has had much remodeling done to it. It is 19½ x 15½. The trim in this room is heavier and more massive; and over the doors there is a wider pediment formed by an extra thickness of moulding to form a cap over the doorway. This is a Greek Revival detail. This room has an ornate metal ceiling and cornice. The fireplace, against the end wall, has been sealed over. The doorway into this room is 3" off line with opposite door.

The kitchen has been remodelled quite often. An old chimney stack comes down into the kitchen and forms a wall separating it from the dining room. A hearth also protrudes into the kitchen. I has been covered up by recent alterations. The kitchen has been divided into a kitchen and pantry and the kitchen itself enlarged by an addition to the side of the house.

On this side of the house the interior walls are hollow while on the other side they are solid with the plaster directly on the brick. The doors on this side are paneled on both sides.

On the second floor the window over the stairway is not centered and it is the same size as the other windows on the first and second floor. It is lined up with the door on the first floor, under the stairway. The hall (and the rooms) on the second floor is 8-1/4 feet high. The attic stairs run up one side of it.

The rooms on the right side are different from those on the left side. The right rear room has a chair rail. The cornice is continued in this room (and in the hall and right front room). The fireplace in this room is the most simple one in the house. A mantel shelf has a moulding under it and one moulding runs around the fireplace opening. The floor of 5½ inch pine boards and the door is only 6 feet 5 inches high. The front bedroom is similar to it excepting the chair rail; and the front bedroom has a fireplace which is very much like the one in the rear room on the first floor.

The part of the house to the left of the hall was probably used as slave or servant quarters. A steep stairway runs up from the kitchen. There are two rooms in the front which have at a later date been opened up into one room. A room and bathroom are in the rear. This part of the house has broad doors just over six feet high. They are of three beveled boards each with a groove down the center. The trim on this section is more sparse.

There is an old rectangular transom of three lights of 9 x 7 glass over a doorway between a room and the kitchen stairway. It was probably placed there to allow light to get into this stairway. There is a tiny window of four 9 x 7 lights in the wall between the back bedroom and the bathroom. The original use of the bathroom is not known, but it appears as if the little window was for ventilation for the room as it has only one other window. The interior walls of this part of the house are of hollow lath construction while the other half has solid walls.

The exterior walls of the house are 8 inches thick. They are frame with brick filling. Clapboards are nailed directly on to the frame. The present clap boards are not the original ones since they run straight across from the old part to the new part. There are 4 inch corner boards at the ends. There is a cornice under the eves with a row of dentils and a wide facia board. This cornice is extended 3 feet around the ends of the house. Rake boards run up the gable ends. A later addition, a veranda, has been built across the front. Around the front windows and door there are Greek Revival mouldings capping them exactly as in the dining room trim. The rear and side windows have no exterior trim. The shutters are new.

One can imagine that when Capt. Cornelius (who was both the designer and builder, according to Miss C. Vermeulel built his house he added to an already existing structure. The pitch of the roof of this structure must have run at a right angle to the present pitch because of its dimensions and the locationof the one chimney in the wall dividing the two rooms of thhis old structure. This building may have been built during the Revolution or even before it. Perhaps by a man of English or Scotch background because of

the way the floor joists were laid. Lack of information of any earlier settlers indicates that it was perhaps built at the time of the Revolution. It is on a line which the soldiers have have taken in going from the Camp to the gap in the mountain which they were protecting.

He must have changed the pitch and perhaps also added dormers. Then and at a later date he raised this roof up to meet the new higher roof. This may have been in 1810 because Miss Cornelia Vermuele said there was some building there at this time. Originally the floor was of 5 inch oakr boards and wide boards were laid over them at a later date. We can imagine that the front door probably had a rectangular transom over it similar to the one in the second floor and that the windows were smaller.

When John Stine was in possession of the house the new windows, front door, mouldings on the facade windows, interior cornice, mouldings over the dining room doors and rear door were probably added. He also had the parlor parquet floor laid, put up the metal ceiling in the dining room and had new clapboards put on (unless they were put on when the roof was equalized). He laso probably put the arches in over the openings on the sides of the fireplaces on the first floor.

A map of the City of Plainfield by F. A. Dunham in 1895 has the house down close to the road. It already has a kitchen extension in it (this on examination is of much newer construction than the rest of the house) and a projecting porch on the rear. This rear porch was removed when the house was moved back from the road. Also at this time, according to Mr. Neumann, the present veranda across the front was added.

This house is an excellent example of the middle class farm houses built during the latter part of the 18th and early part of the 19th century in this area of New Jersey. It has a formal symetrical Georgian plan, a flat facade, simple paneled doors, slightly emphasized corners and sliding sash windows, etc. The roof pitch is still quite steep and the interior trim is rather plain and simple.

It is not as pretentious or advance as the houses that influended its design, but it is more in keeping with the simple, hard-working farm people who built it and lived in it.

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